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las más pequeñas.*

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Japanese Presence in Brazil 100 Years After the First Immigration: Roles of Nikkeis and Business

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to analyze the history, specific characteristics and key factors in the development of mutual relations between Brazil and Japan in the 21st Century, when Japanese immigrants to Brazil are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first arrivals. In the relationship between the two countries, there have been two major factors, viz. the Japanese people who emigrated to Brazil and the corporations that invested in Brazil; however, since the end of the 20th Century a reverse emigration and corporate investment from Brazil to Japan has also been observed.

Key words: Japan, Brazil, immigration, business relations, international relations

Presencia japonesa en Brasil 100 años después de la primera inmigración: El rol de los nikkeis y los negocios

Resumen

Este artículo constituye un intento por analizar la historia, las características especiales y los factores envueltos en el desarrollo de las relaciones entre Japón y Brasil en el siglo XXI en el marco de la celebración de los 100 años de presencia japonesa en este país. El autor plantea la existencia de dos factores fundamentales en la relación bilateral, los inmigrantes japoneses y las corporaciones japonesas que han invertido sus capitales en el gigante del Sur. Según apunta, desde el siglo XX se observa también el fenómeno contrario, es decir, tanto inmigración como inversiones de Brasil en Japón.

Palabras clave: Japón, Brasil, Inmigración, relaciones comerciales, relaciones internacionales.

Introduction

The year 2008 marks the 100th year since the *Kasato Maru*, the first immigrant transport ship to Brazil, arrived at Santos with 781 contract and 10 free immigrants. Commemorative ceremonies were held in Tokyo and Kobe in April 2008, the month when the *Kasato Maru* departed Kobe port, and in Brasilia in June, the month the ship arrived at the Santos port, which was extremely crowded as a harbor for the coffee export trade. The 100th anniversary coincided with a time when Japanese corporate interest in Brazil is building up again. Both nations named the year 2008 «Japan-Brazil Year of Exchange.» This indicates their intention to make this year a new foundation to build a new relationship instead of just denoting a historical commemoration.

This article is an attempt to trace the Japan-Brazil relationship, analyze its specific characteristics and further probe the possibilities in the 21st Century. Rather unique aspects are noted in Japan's relationship with Brazil in the context of Japan's relations with foreign nations.

1. Japan-Brazil Relationship - an Overview

Diplomatic relations between Japan and Brazil were established on November 5, 1895, when the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation was signed in Paris. Thirteen years later, the first immigration took place. It was forty years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the constitutional monarchy under the imperial system was restored replacing the Shogunate feudal system. At the time, Japan had excess labor coming from rural communities while Brazil was experiencing a labor shortage as the largest coffee exporting nation. Thus many of the first immigrants were *colonos* (farm laborers) of *fazendas* (coffee plantations).

In the Japan-Brazil relationship, two major players are seen, i.e., the people factor that began with immigration and the business factor with corporations that trade with and make foreign direct investment in Brazil. The Japan-Brazil relationship developed with these factors intertwined.

Toward the end of the 20th Century, a reversed flow of immigration became noticeable. The reverse human flow phenomenon from Brazil to Japan seeking employment opportunities, called *dekasegi*, has taken place. The Japanese word «*dekasegi*» refers to temporary workers going out for the purpose of earning wages and it is being used in Brazil as such.

Furthermore, in 2008, an epoch-making investment by Petrobras, a state-owned petroleum corporation in Brazil was made by buying out

Nansei Sekiyu, an oil refinery in Okinawa, the first large scale investment in Japan by a Brazilian company. Thus Japan-Brazil relations have entered a new stage where Brazil's presence in Japan must be considered.

The following is the history of Japan-Brazil relations divided by characteristic activities:

First Stage - Immigration period: from the first immigration to the 1950's excluding the years when the diplomatic ties were severed during World War II. The peak of immigration was reached in 1933-34 when 20,000 emigrated annually. Concerned about this rapid increase of Japanese immigrants, in 1934 the Brazilian government restricted Japanese immigrants to 2% of the previous 50 years.

After WWII in 1951, Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty and returned to the international community, and in the following year it restored diplomatic relations with Brazil. As early as December of the same year, the first group of immigrants after the war left Japan for the Amazon area. Brazil became a 'new world', an alternative emigration destination for those that the defeat in the war forced to return to Japan from overseas countries, including China and the Philippines. And it also became a new land of opportunities for those former coal miners who became unemployed as oil replaced coal as the premier energy source.

Second Stage - Years of investment: period of bold investments by Japanese corporations in Brazil from the late 1950's to early 1970's. The period consists of two phases: late 1950's when Brazil's Juscelino Kubitschck government aggressively promoted the policy of Import Substituting Industrialization and late 1960's to early 1970's when a rapid economic growth called the «Miracle of Brazil» was achieved.

Third Stage - Financial period: from the latter half of 1970's to the emergence of Brazil's debt crisis in 1982. This period encompasses the time when Japanese financial institutions, which became active in international business developments, aggressively joined hands with European and American banks and supplied syndicated loans to Brazil.

Fourth Stage - Period of *dekasegi*: While the Japanese corporations lost interest in Brazil due to its debt crisis and consequently the Japan-Brazil relations entered a stagnant stage, from the late 1980's, Nikkei Brazilians immigrated to Japan en masse seeking employment opportunities (The word Nikkei means «of Japanese ancestry.» *Issei* refers to the first generation immigrants, *nisei* second generation, *sansei* the third and so forth.).

Fifth Stage - Period of resurgence of investments by Japanese corporations in Brazil: Japanese corporate interest in Brazil returned as Brazil achieved economic stabilization by the Real Plan. Interest in Brazil as a supply nation in the 21st Century became greater with the rapid price rise of natural resources, foods and energy and as the effectiveness of bio-ethanol fuel as a partial countermeasure to global warming became clear.

As described above, in spite of the interruptions (a diplomatic severance during World War II and the stagnated relations after Brazil's debt crisis), the two countries have maintained the relationship with a changing focus of interest.

2. Nikkei Communities

The number of immigrants from Japan to Brazil, as shown in Table 1, is 188,985 before the War and 71,372 after the War, with total of 260,357. The emigrant ship *Nippon Maru* made her last voyage in 1973. It was the time when Japan was emerging as the world's second largest economy and Brazil was enjoying rapid economic growth. Thirty-five years have passed since then. None of the original passengers of the *Kasato Maru* is alive today and now the sixth generation of Nikkei people (*rokusei*) has been born.

Table 1
Japanese Emigrant to Latin America and the Nikkei Population

Country	Before World War II (1899-1941)	After World War II (1952-1989)	Total	Nikkei Population (est.) As of 2006
Brazil	188,985	71,372	260,357	1,400,000
Peru	33,070	2,615	35,685	90,000
Mexico	14,667	671	15,338	16,750
Argentina	5,398	1,206	6,604	35,000
Paraguay	709	9,612	10,321	7,000
Bolivia	222	6,357	6,579	13,770
Others	2,915	1,572	4,486	6,573
Total	245,966	93,405	339,371	1,569,093

Note: Nikkeis include those with a permanent resident status or naturalized in their respective countries and their descendants up to the third generation.

Source: Kikumura-Yano, Akemi 2002, p.107: for numbers of Japanese Emigrants, Ministry of Foreign Affairs homepage: for size of Nikkeis.

The number of Nikkei Brazilians is a guesstimate at best. The Japanese Foreign Ministry estimates that, as of 2006, Brazilian Nikkei with permanent residency and immigrants from the first generation (naturalized *issei*) to the third generation (*sansei*) total 1.4 million, the largest Nikkei community with 52.7% of the Nikkei population worldwide.

If up to the *rokusei* (the sixth generation) members are counted, it becomes even larger and its members are extremely diversified.

In the beginning, the Japanese immigrants were *colonos* in coffee plantations. The change afterwards is diverse. Many could not endure the demanding work of the *fazendas* and quit. Some moved up from landless tenants to large plantation owners while others found success as vegetable or chicken farmers in rural areas closer to cities. Opening of *colônias* for independent farmers and financial or technical support by the Japanese government helped. They supplied new varieties of vegetables, fruits and flowers and also introduced a prototype of agricultural cooperatives to Brazil.

While many adhered to farming, many others sought success in urban societies. A good example is the Liberdade area of Sao Paulo which attracted many and became at one time almost like a Japanese town. Where Japanese immigrants congregated mutual aid societies sometimes called «cultural associations» were established to maintain relations among themselves as well as with Japan. In the beginning, the immigrants assumed they would go back to Japan someday, but difficulty in earning enough money for the purpose and the outbreak of the War made them stay in Brazil permanently. As they gave up the idea of going home to Japan, they began focusing on education for the children, especially higher education. This has become a foundation for Nikkei leaders in various fields in today's Brazil.

Kiyoshi Harada, editor of *O Nikkei no Brasil* (The Nikkei in Brazil), compiled at the 100th year anniversary of immigration, divides, though he claims that the division is that of expediency, the integration process of the Nikkeis and their descendants into the following 4 stages (Harada, 38-50):

First Stage - from 1908 to 1941: Adaptation period to a new environment and attempts at quick accumulation of riches.

Second Stage - from 1942 to 1962: Immigrants' integration into Brazilian society and an attempt to seek a new homeland.

Third Stage - from 1963 to 1980: Immigrants' new identity sought as Brazilians with acceptance of their paternal roots.

Fourth Stage - after 1981: Complete assimilation and introduction of Japanese culture into Brazilian society.

These days one hears that «every family has a relative married to a non-Nikkei.» Marriages outside Nikkeis are commonplace. Some believe that as many as 60% of *sansei* and *yonsei* (the third and fourth generation) are married to non-Nikkeis (Harada, 49). Reflecting the ethnic diversity in Brazil, many Nikkeis moved into various occupations and social strata. They are spread over the vast geographical area. Many Brazilians moved into other parts of the world outside of the country. The Nikkei Brazilians in Japan are indeed one such example.

In 1954, the first Nikkei was elected to the Federal Congress and in 1969 the first Nikkei cabinet minister was named. At that time, it was rare for a Nikkei to make headlines in the papers. Today, however, many different faces are seen in the media. One sees Nikkeis from politicians such as congressional representatives and mayors to the Air Force Commander, Supreme Court judges, CEOs and directors of corporations, farm owners including «cotton king», painters, movie directors, and soccer players.

There may not have been a conscious effort on the part of Nikkeis, but their community, although small in number (less than 1% of the total population), undoubtedly contributed to the spread of Japanese cultural elements. The Brazilian weekly magazine *Veja* (June 4, 2008) listed words of Japanese origin accepted in Brazilian Portuguese titled «Japanese legacy A-Z100» including *anime* (animation), *caqui doce* (persimmon), *futon* (mattress and quilt), *haikai* (three-verse poem), *mánga* (comic), *rámen* (noodle), *sauquê*(liquor), and *Zen* (a school of Buddhism).

As the assimilation into the Brazilian society progressed, what had an impact on the Nikkei society was *dekasegi* to Japan. The phenomenon started in the late 1980's. The underlying causes were the prolonged economic crisis of Brazil since the debt crisis of 1982 and Japan's shortage of labor, particularly shortage of unskilled labor in the

manufacturing sector. In 1990 the Japanese government revised its Immigration- Control and Refugee-Recognition Act, liberalizing the entry of Nikkei people from *issei* to *sansei* and their families for the purpose of visiting their relatives in Japan. This opened the floodgates for Nikkeis to enter Japan seeking employment. Registered aliens with Brazilian passports were numbered in the 4,000's in 1988, which grew to more than 10,000 in 1989, 50,000 in 1990 and 100,000 in 1991. The number kept growing even as the Brazilian economy was stabilizing, topped 200,000 in 1996 and has surpassed 300,000 since 2005. Some of these Brazilians, mostly Nikkeis, are seeking permanent status or Japanese citizenship.

These workers have been sending US\$ 1 to 2 billion back to Brazil, surpassing the foreign exchange from coffee exports earned from Japan. This has contributed to improving Brazil's international balance of payment. On the other hand, back in Brazil, this phenomenon of many Nikkeis leaving for Japan caused the collapse of Nikkei communities in some areas or the tragic breakup of families.

Meanwhile in Japan, although the country needed Nikkeis as a source of labor, policies or systems could not cope with their rapid increase in number so that working conditions, health insurance, pension, healthcare, or education for their children suffered. This brought about various problems and in some cases caused friction between Nikkei residents and local communities. Difficulties of the Japanese language, too, caused some Nikkei children not to attend schools, which contributes to a rising crimes rate among minors.

While the government has been gradually attempting to respond to such issues, including the formation of a conference of mayors of cities with many Nikkei residents, there are still many issues to be addressed jointly by the governments of Japan and Brazil. In any case, the *dekasegi* phenomenon undoubtedly gave an opportunity for Nikkeis who have assimilated into the Brazilian society to recognize anew their blood relation to Japan.

3. Corporations

The other major factor in the relationship between the two countries is the role of business corporations. As described in the «period of investments» above, Japanese investment in Brazil is divided in two phases. The latter part of 1950's was the time when, only 10 years plus

after the end of the WWII, Japan's neighboring East Asian nations had not yet recovered from the scars of the war and remained hostile toward the Japanese. Brazil, on the other hand, located afar on the opposite side of the globe, never experienced warfare with Japan and had a Nikkei population so that it was one of the first targets of Japan's capital as export and investment after the war.

Table 2
Development of Brazil's Trade with Japan and Its FDI from Japan

	Exportation		Importation		FDI	
	F.O.B	Part.(%)	F.O.B.	Part.(%)	Amount	Part.(%)
1990	2,348.5	7.5	1,482.3	7.2	121.8	12.3
1991	2,556.6	8.1	1,433.4	6.8	214.1	19.4
1992	2,305.5	6.4	1,446.0	7.0	69.4	3.4
1993	2,313.0	6.0	1,918.8	7.6	25.6	2.0
1994	2,574.1	5.9	2,411.9	7.3	83.5	3.9
1995	3,101.6	6.7	3,300.9	6.6	40.9	0.9
1996	3,047.1	6.4	2,783.8	5.2	192.2	1.8
1997	3,068.1	5.8	3,534.4	5.9	342.1	1.8
1998	2,204.9	4.3	3,274.3	5.7	277.8	1.0
1999	2,192.7	4.6	2,575.8	5.2	274.3	1.0
2000	2,474.2	4.5	2,961.3	5.3	384.7	1.2
2001	1,989.8	3.4	3,063.6	5.5	826.6	3.7
2002	2,102.5	3.5	2,347.5	5.0	504.5	3.0
2003	2,315.6	3.2	2,520.5	5.2	1,368.3	13.5
2004	2,774.2	2.9	2,868.7	4.6	243.2	1.2
2005	3,482.6	2.9	3,405.0	4.6	779.1	3.6
2006	3,894.5	2.8	3,839.6	4.2	659.5	2.9
2007	4,321.3	2.7	4,609.5	3.8	500.9	1.5

Note: Part.: Participation in Brazilian total trade and FDI.

Source: Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade and Central Bank of Brazil.

It coincided with the time when Brazil's all out efforts were for industrial development through the policy of Import Substituting Industrialization. Many corporate leaders of various industries moved into Brazil: auto (Toyota Motor), shipbuilding (Ishikawajima), cotton spinning (five companies including Toyobo and Kanebo), textile machinery (Howa), farm machinery (Yanmar and Kubota) and others. What has become an icon of the Japan-Brazil cooperation was Usiminas

which became the second integrated steel mill in Brazil. It started operation in 1962 with crude steel production with a capacity of 500,000 tons/year, which increased to the current production capacity of 8.7 million tons/year. The mill was built in Minas Gerais, President Kubitscheck's constituency and a mining area for iron ore.

Japan's idea for Usiminas investment was not to supply Japan with steel products, but it aimed to boost its heavy machinery industry by exporting. In 1962, Japan's steel industry signed a long-term agreement for iron ore purchase with Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD, nationally owned then, privatized now as Vale). This was the first long-term iron ore contract for Brazil, and became a model for a large scale mining development.

The second phase is from the late 1960's to the early 1970's when Japanese appliance makers such as Matsushita (now Panasonic), Sharp, Sony, Toshiba and the like moved into a Brazilian market that was enjoying rapid growth. Japanese investments included many industries such as motorcycle (Honda, Yamaha), camera (Yashica, now Kyocera), auto parts, machinery, and construction. Many corporations moved into Manaus which was designated as a Free Industrial Zone by the Brazilian government for the purpose of regional development in the central Amazon.

Another characteristic of this period is large scale investments in natural resources. At the time of the oil crisis in the early 1970's, scarcity of resources was a matter of concern similar to present days. It was called a national project, because Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organization) and the Japanese government supported investment groups organized by manufacturers and trading companies. Their main projects were: (1) production of pellets making use of iron ore powder (Nibrasco), (2) pulp production using fast growing eucalyptus (Cenibra), (3) production of bare aluminum to add value to bauxite abundantly found in Brazil (Albrás), and (4) building slab mills aimed at producing for export semi-finished steel (CST). In agriculture, the Japan-Brazil joint project (Prodecer) was carried on in order to transform the Cerrado, the semi-dry region in central Brazil, into a granary.

Each of these investments has grown into an industry that supports the current exports of Brazil.

Such investments involving large scale projects continued till the early 1980's, but Brazil's debt crisis in 1982 caused Japan to shift its focus to rapidly growing East Asia and her interest in Brazil quickly cooled. Further, what made the situation worse was the burst of Japan's

bubble economy in the early 1990's. This coincided with the time when Brazil moved away from the nationalistic policy of Import Substituting Industrialization and began promoting privatization and economic liberalization, but Japanese businesses were too busy pursuing streamlining of themselves or «business selection and focusing» to enjoy this change of environment (see Table 2). In this regard, the passive stance of Japanese corporations stood out in contrast to that of aggressive Western capitals.

While the Japan-Brazil relations stagnated, it is noteworthy that the Japan Bank of International Corporation (JBIC), a state financial organization, aggressively financed /invested?? in Petrobras which wanted a quick development in mining as liberalization of the oil business was brought about through the revision of law in 1997.

According to the research on foreign direct investments (FDI) by Brazil's central bank, as of 1995 in investment balance Japan ranked fourth trailing the U.S., Germany, and Switzerland, and five years later Japan fell back to eighth (Banco Central do Brasil, 2001/09/11).

It was said that «the Japan-Brazil relationship is extremely stagnated», but in Japan the presence of Brazil and Brazilians rapidly increased thanks to the *dekasegi* phenomenon. In the popular front, Brazilian soccer players' playing in the Japanese league, All Japan Soccer Team appointing a Brazilian manager, Brazilian bossa nova's popularity, TV programs, newspapers and magazines in Portuguese, and the opening of Brazilian restaurants helped strengthen Brazilian presence in Japan.

Stepping out of investment stagnation in Brazil in the 2000's, a new movement became observable which may be called the third phase of investment. With a stabilized Brazilian economy as the background, Japanese corporate ideas of positioning investments in Brazil as a part of global strategy and not merely bilateral business projects make it different from the second and the third phases.

That a Japanese corporate group bought the stocks of Cenibra (pulp company) which Vale (formerly CVRD) dumped, or that Mitsui (Japanese trading company) acquired capital in Vale, indicated that Japanese wanted to secure the provision of natural resources. Nippon Steel Corp., a major steel company, increased its holding in Usiminas and also decided to build a new shaft furnace jointly with Usiminas. Another steel maker, Sumitomo Metal Industries, has also started constructing a steel mill specializing in seamless pipes jointly with a French corporation. Toyota has decided to increase the production of automobiles

and Honda, similarly, the production of automobiles and motorcycles, which resulted in Japanese auto parts makers moving into Brazil.

When President Ignácio Lula da Silva visited Japan in May, 2005, memoranda of understanding regarding various aspects of ethanol were signed, and in June 2006 the government of Brazil adopted the Japanese system for digital broadcasting. These are encouraging signs for the economic relations between two countries.

Tables 3 shows the changes of perception by the Japanese corporations. It was compiled by JBIC Institute on the basis of questionnaires. The research has been done continuously since 1989 and the participants are corporations operating outside Japan. They were asked to name countries where they wish to develop business operations within a medium-term period of the coming 3 years. Brazil ranked 16th in 2003, but in 2006 it jumped to 7th.

Table 3
Promising partners for investment in next three years

Ranking	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1	China	China	China	China	China
2	Thailand	Thailand	India	India	India
3	USA	India	Thailand	Vietnam	Vietnam
4	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Thailand	Thailand
5	India	USA	USA	USA	Russia
6	Indonesia	Russia	Russia	Russia	USA
7	South Korea	Indonesia	South Korea	Brazil	Brazil
8	Taiwan	South Korea	Indonesia	South Korea	Indonesia
9	Malaysia	Taiwan	Brazil	Indonesia	South Korea
10	Russia	Malaysia	Taiwan	Taiwan	Taiwan
	16 Brazil	13 Brazil			

Source: *Journal of JBIC Institute*, Various editions.

However, we should not exaggerate Japan's investments vis-à-vis Brazil. Research by an economic journal shows that, as of 2007, the number of locally incorporated Japanese entities in Brazil was 260, whereas the corresponding figure in China is 4,878, which grows to 6,020 if Hong Kong and Macao are included (Toyo Keizai Shinposha).

Brazil's exports to China eclipsed Japan in 2002 reaching 6% of Brazil's total exports.

Final Remarks

As shown above, Japan-Brazil relations have evolved around the axis of «human» and «corporate» elements. These elements have certainly mutually influenced each other. However, the affinity between these elements has not necessarily been intimate. Stereo-typical views toward Nikkeis still remain among Japanese corporations due to the history of immigrants and the current status of the *dekasegi* people. At the same time, Nikkeis cannot discard the lingering sense of not being treated equally.

If the 100th anniversary can help put such negative feelings to rest, it will certainly strengthen Japan's presence in Brazil and Brazil's presence in Japan. In this sense, it is significant that Brazilian corporations with offices in Japan opened the Brazil Chamber of Commerce in Japan in 2001, that in April 2008 Petrobras bought out Nansei Oil of Okinawa and also that Japan Air Lines decided to purchase Embraer 145, a commuter aircraft made in Brazil.

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